

# Nan of Music Mountain

By  
FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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## DE SPAIN PERSISTS IN HIS EFFORTS TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH NAN MORGAN—HE FALLS INTO A TRAP LAID BY THE GANG AND FACES IMMEDIATE DEATH

The region around Sleepy Cat, a railroad division town in the Rocky Mountain mining country, is infested with stage robbers, cattle rustlers and gunmen. The worst of these belong to the Morgan gang, whose hang-out is in Morgan gap, a fertile valley about 20 miles from Sleepy Cat, and near Calabasas, a point where the horses are changed on the stage line from the Thief River mines to the railroad. Jeffries, superintendent of the Mountain division, decides to break up the depredations of the bad men and appoints Henry De Spain general manager of the stage line, with John LeFevre and Bob Scott, an Indian, as his assistants. They make Calabasas their headquarters. Trouble starts at once. The principal bad men are Sassoon, Logan, Deaf Sandusky and Gale Morgan. De Spain foolishly becomes smitten with pretty Nan Morgan, Gale's cousin, but she ignores his overtures. When this installment opens De Spain and his aids are trying to pick a fight with Logan and Sandusky in a gambling house.

### CHAPTER VII—Continued.

Logan pushed back his chair. As he turned his legs from under the table to rise, a hand rested on his shoulder. He looked up and saw the brown face and feeble smile of Scott. Logan with his nearest kick kicked Sandusky. The big fellow looked up and around. Either by chance or in following the sound of the last voice, his glance fell on De Spain. He scrutinized for a suspicious instant the burning eyes and the red mark low on the cheek. While he did so—comprehension dawning on him—his enormous hands, forsaking the pile of chips with which both had been for a moment busy, flattened out, palms down, on the faro table. Logan tried to rise. Scott's hand rested heavily on him. "What's the row?" demanded Sandusky in the queer tone of a deaf man. Logan pointed at De Spain. "That Medicine Bend duck wants a fight."

"With a man, Logan; not with a cub," retorted De Spain, matching insult with insult. "Maybe I can do something for you," interrupted Sandusky. His eyes ran like a flash around the table. He saw how LeFevre had pre-empted the best place in the room. He looked up and back at the man standing now at his shoulder, and almost between Logan and himself. It was the Indian, Scott. Sandusky felt, as his faculties cleared and arranged themselves every instant, that there was no hurry whatever about lifting his hand; but he could not be faced down without a show of resistance, and he concluded that for this occasion his tongue was the best weapon. "If I can," he added stily, "I'm at your service."

De Spain made no answer beyond keeping his eyes on Sandusky's eyes. Tension, overhearing the last words, awoke to the situation and rose from his case. He made his way through the crowd around the disputants and brusquely directed the dealer to close the game. While Sandusky was cursing in, Tension took Logan aside. What Tension said was not audible, but it sufficed to quiet the little fellow. The only thing further to be settled was as to who should leave the room last, since neither party was willing to go first. Tension, after a formal conference with LeFevre and Logan, offered to take Sandusky and Logan by a private stairway to the billiard room, while LeFevre took De Spain and Scott out by way of the main entrance. This was arranged, and when the railroad men reached the street rain had ceased falling.

Scott warned De Spain to keep within doors, and De Spain promised to do so. But when they left him he started out at once to see whether he could not, by some happy chance, encounter Nan.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### A Cup of Coffee.

He was willing, after a long and bootless search, to confess to himself that he would rather see Nan Morgan for one minute than all women else in the world for a lifetime. The other incidents of the evening would have given any ordinary man enough food for reflection—indeed they did force De Spain to realize that his life would hang by a slender thread while he remained at Sleepy Cat and continued to brave the rulers of the slinks.

But this danger, which after all was a portion of his responsibility in freeing his stages from the depredations of the Calabasas gang, failed to make on him the moving impression of one moment of Nan Morgan's eyes. There was in the whole world nothing he wanted to do so much as in some way to please her—yet it seemed his ill luck to get continually deeper into her bad graces. Every day that he rode across the open country, his eyes turned to the far range and to Music Mountain. The rounded, distant, immutable peak—majestic as the sun, cold as the stars, shrouding in its unknown fastnesses the mysteries of the ages and the secrets of time—meant to him now this mountain girl whom its solitude sheltered and to whom his thoughts continually came back.

Within two weeks he became desperate. He rode the gap trail from Sleepy Cat again and again for miles and miles in the effort to encounter her. He came to know every ridge and hollow on it, every patch and stone between the lava beds and the Rat river. And in spite of the counsels of his associates, who warned him to beware of traps, he spent, under one pretext or another, much of the time either on the stages to and from Calabasas or in the saddle toward Morgan's gap, looking for Nan.

Killing time in this way, after a fruitless ride, his persistence was one day most unexpectedly rewarded. He had ridden through a hot sun from Sleepy Cat to Calabasas, where he had an appointment to meet Scott and LeFevre at five o'clock. When De Spain reached the Calabasas barn, McAlpin, the barn boss, was standing in the doorway. "You'd never be comin' from Sleepy Cat in the saddle!" exclaimed McAlpin incredulously. De Spain nodded affirmatively as he dismounted. "Hot ride, sir; a hot day," commented McAlpin as he called a man to take the horse, unstrapped De Spain's coat from the saddle, and followed the manager into the office.

The heat was oppressive, and De Spain unbuckled his cartridge belt, slipped his revolver from the holster, mechanically stuck it inside his trousers waistband, hung the heavy belt up under his coat, and, sitting down, called for the stage report and asked whether the new blacksmith had soaped up. When McAlpin had given him all minor information called for, De Spain walked with him out into the barn to inspect the horses. Passing the very last of the box-stalls, the manager saw in it a pony. He stopped. This wiry, sleek-looking roan, contentedly munching at the moment some company hay, was Nan Morgan's.

"What's that horse doing here?" demanded De Spain coldly. Before answering, the barn boss eyed De Spain very carefully to see how the wind was setting, for the pony's presence confessed an infraction of a very particular rule. "You see," he began, cocking at his strict boss from below his visorless cap a questioning Scotch eye, "I like to keep on good terms with that Morgan gang. Some of them can be very ugly. That little pony is Nan Morgan's."

"What's her horse doing here?" asked De Spain.

McAlpin made even the most inconsequential approaches to a statement



"Hot Day, Sir; Hot Ride."

with a keen and questioning glance. "The girl went up to the Cat on the early stage, sir. She's coming back this afternoon."

"What is she riding away over here to Calabasas for to take the stage, instead of riding straight into Sleepy Cat?"

Once more McAlpin eyed him carefully. "The girl's been sick."

"She ain't really fit to ride a step," confided the Scotch boss with growing confidence. "But she's been going up two or three times now to get some medicine from Doc Torpy—that's the way of it. There's a nice girl, sir—in a bunch o' ruffians, I know—though old Duke, she lives with, he ain't a half-bad man except for too many cards. I used to work for him—but I call her a nice girl. Do you happen to know her?"

De Spain had long been on guard. "I've spoken with her in a business way once or twice. I can't really say I know her. Anything sick, Jim?" asked De Spain, walking on down the barn and looking at the horses. It was only the second time since he had given him the job that De Spain had called the barn boss "Jim," and McAlpin answered with the rising assurance of one who realizes he is "in" right. "Not so much as a sore hoof in either alley, Mr. De Spain. I try to take care of them, sir."

"What are we paying you, Jim?"

"Twenty-seven a week, sir; pretty heavy work at that."

"We'll try to make it thirty-two after this week."

McAlpin touched his cap. "Thank you kindly, sir, I'm sure. It comes high to live out here, Mr. De Spain." "What did you say," asked De Spain indifferently, "had been the matter with Nan Morgan?" Her name seemed a whole mouthful to speak, so fearful was he of betraying interest.

"Why, I really didn't say, sir. And I don't know. But from what she says, and the way she coughs, I'm thinking it was a touch of this pnew-monia that's going around so much lately, sir."

His listener had already made all arrangements to meet the occasion now presenting itself. Circumstances seemed at last to favor him, and he looked at his watch. The down stage bringing Nan back would be due in less than an hour.

"Jim," he said thoughtfully, "you are doing the right thing in showing some good-will toward the Morgans." "Now, I'm glad you think that, sir." "You know I unintentionally rubbed their backs the wrong way in dragging Sassoon out."

"They're jealous of their power, I know—very jealous."

"This seems the chance to show that I have no real animosity myself toward the outfit."

Since De Spain was not looking at him, McAlpin cocked two keen and curious eyes on the sphinxlike birthmark of the very amiable speaker's face. However, the astute boss, if he wondered, made no comment. "When the stage comes in," continued De Spain quietly, "have the two grays—Lady and Ben—hitched to my own light wagon. I'll drive her over to the gap myself."

"The very thing," exclaimed McAlpin, staring and struggling with his breath.

"In some way I've happened, both times I talked with her, to get in wrong—understand?" McAlpin, with clearing wits, nodded more than once. "No fault of mine; it just happened so. And she may not at first take kindly to the idea of going with me."

"I see."

"But she ought to do it. She will be tired—it's a long, dusty ride for a well woman, let alone one that has been ill."

"So it is, so it is!"

De Spain looked now shamelessly at his ready-witted aid. "See that her pony is lame when she gets here—can't be ridden. But you'll take good care of him and send him home in a few days—get it?"

McAlpin half closed his eyes. "He'll be so lame it would stagger a cowboy to back him ten feet—and never be hurt a mite, neither. Trust me!"

"If she insists on riding something, or even walking home," continued De Spain dubiously, for he felt instinctively that he should have the task of his life to induce Nan to accept any kind of a peace-offering. "I'll ride or walk with her anyway. Can you sleep here tonight, on the hay?"

"Sleep you on a hair mattress, sir. You've got a room right here upstairs; didn't you know that?"

With arrangements so begun, De Spain walked out of doors and looked reflectively up the Sleepy Cat road. One further refinement in his appeal for Nan's favor suggested itself. She would be hungry, possibly faint in the heat and dust, when she arrived. He returned to McAlpin: "Where can I get a good cup of coffee when the stage comes in?"

"Go right down to the inn, sir. It's a new chap running it—a half-witted man from Texas. My wife is cooking there off and on. She'll fix you up a sandwich and a cup of good coffee."

It was four o'clock, and the sun beat down to the inn unimpeded of the heat. In summer rig, with his soft-shirt collar turned under, his forearms bare, and his thoughts engaged, he made his way rapidly on, looking neither to the right nor the left.

As he approached the weather-beaten

inn he looked no more at the inn but

shine than it had looked in shadow; and, true to its traditions, not a living being was anywhere to be seen. The door of the office stood ajar. De Spain, pushing it all the way open, walked in. No one greeted him as he crossed the threshold, and the unsightly room was still bare of furnishings except for the bar, with its two broken mirrors.

De Spain pounded on the bar. His effort to attract attention met with no response. He walked to the left end of the bar, lifted the handrail that inclosed the space behind it, and pushed open the door between the mirrors leading to the back room. This, too, was empty. He called out—there was no response. Mrs. McAlpin had apparently gone home for a while.

Irritated at the desertion of the place, due, he afterward learned, to the heat of the afternoon, and disappointed at the frustration of his purpose, he walked back to the office. As he lifted the handrail and, passing through, lowered it behind him, he took out his watch to see how soon the stage was due. While he held the time-piece in his hand he heard a rapid clatter of hoofs approaching the place. Thinking it might be Scott and LeFevre arriving from the south an hour ahead of time, he started toward the front door—which was still open—to greet them. Outside, hurried footsteps reached the door just ahead of him



He Called Out—There Was No Response.

and a large man, stepping quickly into the room, confronted De Spain. One of the man's hands rested lightly on his right side. De Spain recognized him instantly; the small, drooping head, carried well forward, the keen eyes, the loud-patterned, shabby waistcoat proclaimed beyond doubt—Deaf Sandusky.

### CHAPTER IX.

#### The Glass Button.

Even as the big fellow stepped lightly just inside and to the left—as De Spain stood—of the door and faced him, the encounter seemed to De Spain accidental. But before he could speak, a second man appeared in the doorway, and this man appeared to be joking with a third, behind him. As the second man crossed the threshold, De Spain saw Sandusky's high-voiced little fighting cry, Logan, who now made way, as he stepped within to the right of the open door, for the swinging shoulders and rolling stride of Gale Morgan.

Morgan, eying De Spain with insolence, as was his wont, closed the door behind him with a bang. Then he backed his powerful frame significantly against it.

A blind man could have seen the completeness of the snare. An unpleasant feeling flashed across De Spain's perception. It was only for the immeasurable part of a second—while uncertainty was resolving itself into a rapid certainty. When Gale Morgan stepped into the room on the heels of his two Calabasas friends, De Spain would have sold for less than a cup of coffee all his chances for life. Nevertheless, before Morgan had set his back fairly against the door and the trap was sprung, De Spain had mapped his fight.

He did not retreat from where he halted at the instant Sandusky entered. His one slender chance was to hug to the men that meant to kill him. Morgan, the nearest, he esteemed the least dangerous of the three; but to think to escape both Sandusky and Logan at close quarters was, he knew, more than ought to be hoped for.

While Morgan was closing the door, De Spain smiled at his visitors: "That isn't necessary, Morgan—I'm not ready to run." Morgan only continued to stare at him. "I need hardly ask," added De Spain, "whether you fellows have business with me?"

He looked to Sandusky for a reply; it was Logan who answered in shrill

falsest: "No. We don't happen to have business that I know of. A friend of ours may have a little, maybe!" Logan, lifting his shoulders with his laugh, looked toward his companions for an answer to his joke.

De Spain's smile appeared unruffled: "You'll help him transact it, I suppose?"

Logan, looking again toward Sandusky, grinned: "He won't need any help."

"Who is your friend?" demanded De Spain, cautiously. Logan's glance misled him, it did not refer to Sandusky. And even as he asked the question De Spain heard through the half-open window at the end of the bar the sound of hoofs. Hoping against hope for LeFevre, the interruption cheered him. It certainly did not seem that his situation could be made worse.

"Well," answered Logan, talking again to his gallery of cronies, "we've got two or three friends that want to see you. They're waiting outside to see what you'll look like in about five minutes—ain't they, Gale?"

Someone was moving within the rear room. De Spain felt hope in every footfall he heard, and the mention of Morgan's name cleared his plan of battle. Before Gale, with an oath, could blurt out his answer, De Spain had resolved to fight where he stood, taking Logan first and Morgan as he should jump in between the two. It was at the best a hopeless venture against Sandusky's first shot, which De Spain knew was almost sure to reach a vital spot. But desperate men cannot be choosers.

"There's no time for seeing me like the present," declared De Spain, ignoring Morgan and addressing his words to Logan. "Bring your friends in. What are you complaining about, Morgan?" he asked, resenting the stream of abuse that Gale hurled at him whenever he could get a word in. "I had my turn at you with a rifle the other day. You've got your turn now. And I call it a pretty soft one, too—don't you, Sandusky?" he demanded suddenly of the big fellow.

Sandusky alone through the talk had kept an unbroken silence. He was eating up De Spain with his eyes, and De Spain not only asked to hear him speak, but was resolved to make him. Sandusky had stood motionless from the instant he entered the room. His eyes rested intently on De Spain, and at his side the long fingers of his right hand beat a soft tattoo against his pistol holster. De Spain's question seemed to arouse him. "What's your name?" he demanded bluntly. His voice was heavy and his deafness was reflected in the strained tone.

"It's on the butt of my gun, Sandusky."

"What's that he says?" demanded the man known as the butcher, asking the question of Logan, but without taking his eyes off his shifty prey.

Logan raised his voice to repeat the words and to add a ribald comment. "You make a good deal of noise," muttered Sandusky, speaking again to De Spain.

"That ought not to bother you much, Sandusky," shouted De Spain, trying to win a smile from his taciturn antagonist.

"His noise won't bother anybody much longer," put in Logan, whose retorts overflowed at every interval. But there was no smile even hinted at in the uncompromising vigilance of Sandusky's expressionless face. De Spain discounted the next few minutes far enough to feel that Sandusky's first shot would mean death to him, even if he could return it.

"I'll tell you, De Spain," continued Logan, "we're going to have a drink with you. Then we're going to prepare you for going back where you come from—with nice flowers."

"I guess you thought you could come out here and run over everybody in the Spanish slinks," interposed Morgan, with every oath he could summon to load his words.

"Keep out, Morgan," exclaimed Logan testily. "I'll do this talking."

De Spain continued to banter. "Gentlemen," he said, addressing the three together and realizing that every moment wasted before the shooting added a grain of hope, "I am ready to drink when you are."

"He's ready to drink, Tom," roared Morgan in the deaf man's ear.

"I'm ready," announced Sandusky in hollow voice.

Do you believe that De Spain could save his life by surrendering to the gangsters and offering to get out of the neighborhood if they spared him? Would you do it in these circumstances?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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### Probably Not.

"The clock is striking twelve," said the impassioned suitor. "Oh, that I might turn back the hands of time for one hour!"

"You might be able to do that, Algernon," said the beautiful maid, "but father will be coming downstairs soon and I'm afraid you couldn't turn him back."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

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